

Challenge

Examples

1. The Raging Introvert

Some people say little or nothing, and seem distant from the group.

Facilitator: "I think we have consensus, but I haven't heard from that side of the room."
Bill: Slightly nods, eyes downturned

2. Sleepy Heads

Most people in the group are numb, tuned out, distracted, or half asleep.

Facilitator: "The heat bill went up \$200 this month. What should we do?"
Group: Silence

3. Venting, Careful!

Community members demean, judge, or denounce each other directly or behind their backs.

Lynn: Can you believe she said that during the meeting? She's always like that, off in la-la land, suggesting ridiculous ideas.

4. Total Domination!

One or a few people dominate, while others are upset or withdraw. A facilitator or leader responds to every speaker with her/his own opinion.

Facilitator: What do people want to do about the broken fridge?
Jack: We could also ask our mailing list for donations to buy a new one.
Facilitator: Yeah, but that will take too long.

Jill: We could buy a less expensive used one.
Facilitator: I don't like that idea because it probably won't last.

Sheet1

5. The Manipulator

When we manipulate others into accepting their ideas using power plays, manipulation or maneuvering.

Facilitator: We have an offer for more volunteers on Tuesdays. What do folks think?

Becky (who is around the house a lot) : I feel like the people who are around the house the most should get to decide. After all, we're doing most of the work.

6. The Battering Ram

Decisions get made too quickly without adequate discussion and feel rammed through. People feel rushed or under time pressure.

Facilitator: "We need to get going- we're way over time for this item. Can we just make a decision?"

7. The Mouthpeice

Speaking for others; when we try and sway the larger group by implying "majority rules" mindset.

"A lot of us think that we should..."

"We were talking about this before the meeting, and we feel like...."

8. Your Idea Sucks!

When we belittle others' ideas by nitpicking: finding minor flaws in statements of others; stating the exception to every generality; blowing someone's differing idea out of proportion to make one's point

"If we follow your idea, every guest will always stay out every night since we're not being consistent with the rules"

"I heard about a group trying this once, and it didn't work, so we shouldn't even try"

9. Meta-talking, oh my!

Meta-talking is talking about how we communicate and talk. It can be used effectively, but can also be over-used, reslting in the group that spends most of its time on setting up the process rather than solving problems.

"I thought we were going to talk about my item first, not third. Can we decide what order all the agenda items are in?"

"We should talk about this with a go around instead of popcorn-style."

What to say?

“Bill, you seem upset/angry/not happy. Is there something going on?” (during, or after mtg). Discuss what would help make them feel connected to the group.

Encourage shy folks to do reporting: "Bill, could you fill us in on what's going on with the house?"

Break into small groups so shy people can feel safer speaking during discussion.

During the meeting, do a group activity that gently draws in shy people.

"Low energy wave! Why don't we take a 10 minute break then return to this question."

"People seem to have no energy. Is there something we can do to the environment to help? (Open a window, pass out coffee, hold the meeting earlier, get a more comfortable room, etc.)

"Let's table this for now, end the meeting, and come back refreshed next week - what do people think?"

"We probably shouldn't say anything about Carol that we wouldn't say to her face."

"It was a hard meeting, and we're all doing our best. Should we move on?"

"It sounds like you're frustrated with Carol - you should really talk to her!"

"I really appreciate your ideas, facilitator, but it might help the group if you could be more neutral and only offer opinions when you explicitly step out of the role of facilitator"

"Could we take a minute of silence so that everyone gets a chance to talk"

"Has someone who hasn't spoken like to share?"

"I'm hearing your thoughts, Tom, but I want to make sure we hear from others too."

Go-around the circle and offer ideas without interruption or responses.

Sheet1

Gently point out the manipulation, and ask the group to re-focus on the question at hand. "Becky, I know you're around a lot, and we want to hear the voices of people who will be most affected, but we also want to respect the consensus value of everyone having a voice in this decision. Are you ok with this?"
Make the manipulation something for the group to discuss. "Becky, I'm wondering if we should talk about the issue you're bringing up - that people who are around more should have a greater voice in the consensus. Could we discuss that question next week, and discuss the volunteer issue next week?"

"Could the group decide to add 20 minutes to our agenda tonight so that we have time to discuss this?"

"Could we put this item on next week's agenda so we can have more time to discuss it?"

"I'm feeling rushed, but it might just be me? Is everyone comfortable with this pace?"

Use the tools of agenda review, and put the right container around the right agenda item.

"Let's make sure that everyone has the chance to speak for themselves"

"Would you be willing to have the group try this idea, even though you have some reservations?"

"It seems like there could be some small issues with this proposal; do folks want to pursue discussing it to see if we can resolve these issues, or should we discuss another idea?"

"Let's all try to remember to refer to ideas by their content, rather than the person that's presenting it."

"This might be a case of personal preference - can we go with what the facilitator created, or do you have strong feelings about changing the order?"

"You raise a great question about our process. Can we follow the agenda as written for now, and put an item on for next week about how we prioritize items?"